

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE E3THE NEW YORK TIMES  
23 September 1979P. Burt, Richard  
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# Are the Russians Outspending U.S. On Weapons?

## *Differing Views on the Defense Budget Could Affect SALT Agreement*

By RICHARD BURT

WASHINGTON — Last Tuesday, Senator Sam Nunn, the reigning Congressional expert on military affairs, delivered a gloomy message. After giving his colleagues a batch of complicated graphs and statistics, the Georgia Democrat announced that over the past decade, the Soviet Union had outspent the United States for military forces by \$104 billion.

The Carter Administration's original defense budget request totalled \$135 billion and this was "a large sum of money..." Mr. Nunn acknowledged. But he argued that the 1980 Pentagon budget "is less in real dollars than the defense budget of 1965, after inflation is taken into account." In almost every category — troops, ships, submarines and fighter planes — the United States was planning to buy fewer weapons than it produced 15 years ago. Mr. Nunn's statistics showed Moscow's military effort had consistently grown since 1965, to a defense budget as much as 50 percent greater than Mr. Carter was requesting. Spending 11 or 12 percent of its gross national product annually for defense, as compared with less than 5 percent for the United States, Moscow was on the verge of achieving a real degree of military superiority in both nuclear and conventional forces. (At the official exchange rate, the 500 billion ruble Soviet G.N.P. would equal \$694 billion, compared with the \$1.7 trillion United States G.N.P.)

Mr. Nunn's statistics seemed persuasive. The Senate agreed to add \$4 billion to the Administration's 1980 budget, which the Administration was ready to take, and to increase the 1981 and 1982 Pentagon budgets by a full 5 percent, which the Administration didn't want. At first, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown said that the 5 percent increases were not needed to maintain the military balance with Moscow.

But evidently reacting to Mr. Nunn's clout in the debate over the strategic arms treaty, Mr. Brown changed his tune later and told the Foreign Relations Committee that future increases in the Pentagon budget beyond 3 percent would not be ruled out.

Mr. Nunn's influence, however, apparently did not extend to the House Appropriations Committee. In contrast to the Senate, it cut Mr. Carter's 1980 request by \$2.4 billion. The action laid the groundwork for a Congressional debate on defense spending whose outcome later this year could determine the fate of the SALT treaty. Underlying the Pentagon budget debate was a still more controversial question: Was the United States, as Senator Nunn charged, really falling behind in the spending race with Moscow?

Many listeners found Mr. Nunn's case for increasing military spending convincing because, for the most part, he relied on the Administration's own figures. However, critics of official estimates of the Soviet military effort argue that these should be approached with great caution. Analysts in organizations supporting arms control and for Defense Information, make the following points:

- Soviet spending figures are suspect. Like the United States, the Soviet Union unveils an annual military budget. Last year, Moscow said it planned to spend roughly half as much as the United States for defense. However, intelligence analysts have never taken Soviet military budget figures seriously, arguing that Moscow regularly hides vast amounts for its military in budgets for science and industry. Accordingly, the Central Intelligence Agency has developed a complex — and controversial — system of estimates. In essence, it compiles lists of new Soviet weapons and then calculates how much these arms would cost to build in the United States. While its proponents argue that this approach gives a good picture of the Soviet economy's military burden, critics contend that it exaggerates actual spending. For example, because its labor costs are much lower than in the United States, Moscow is able to build many items for far less. "You can bet that it doesn't cost the Soviets \$1 million to build a tank like it does here," said one researcher.

- While there is little disagreement that their defense effort is expanding, Defense Secretary Brown and other Administration officials point out that the Soviet Union must cope with the Chinese military threat as well as with Western power. Indeed, recent C.I.A. reports maintain that much of the recent growth in the size of the Soviet Army can be accounted for by the buildup along the 2,000-mile border with China. Other officials argue that it is a mistake, in looking at the East-West military balance, to only focus on the two superpowers. These analysts contend that, in combined military budgets, the 15 members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization still are outspending the seven countries of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact.

- Critics of Soviet-American spending comparisons also argue that while Moscow appears to use its military budget to build more, the United States has tried to build better weapons. Thus Mr. Brown has repeatedly told senators that American defense policy relies on superior technology to deter large-scale conflict rather than trying to match the Soviet Union "man for man, or tank for tank."

This said, Mr. Nunn did appear to reflect a growing consensus in defense circles that the military balance is tilting toward Moscow. In part, this belief is based on a recognition that while maintaining its numerical edge in many areas, the Soviet military is catching up with the West in technical prowess. Thus, despite the controversy over spending comparisons, there was little dissent with Mr. Brown's statement last week that "a reasonable worldwide balance still exists because of our past efforts, but unless we act fast to increase our efforts, the difference in current effort would soon be reflected in an unacceptable imbalance."